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SUBJECT: GOM Explains Decision on 7th Troop Rotation to Iraq

Ulaanbaatar 550 (NOTAL - Available via SIPDIS)

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¶1. (U) Reftel reported GOM's decision to send a seventh rotation of soldiers to Iraq, consisting of a "small number of command staff officers." The sixth rotation, whose tour is up in September, consists of 100 soldiers, serving under Polish command in Camp Echo, performing force protection duties.

¶2. (SBU) On July 20, DCM and E/P Chief met with PM's Foreign Policy Advisor Davaasuren and with MFA Director General for Americas, Middle East and Africa Jambaldorj. DCM welcomed the Mongolian decision to continue to participate in the military coalition in Iraq, but noted that the process for conveying this decision to us could have been better; we had only received the MFA note late yesterday after an erroneous newspaper report in the morning indicating that the National Security Council (NSC) had decided before the July 11-14 Naadam holiday to completely withdraw from Iraq.

¶3. (SBU) Jambaldorj agreed that the process could have been better, and explained that the cabinet, and not the NSC as the press had reported, had made the decision on July 7. Because of the press of foreign delegations arriving for Mongolia's 800th anniversary celebration during Naadam, paper flow had been stopped within the government. Commenting that Mongolian newspapers are prone to carrying inaccurate reports, Jambaldorj said that the newspaper's information was erroneous: there had been no discussion at the NSC meeting or in Cabinet of totally withdrawing from Iraq, only of deploying a group of officers. He stressed that the only factor going into the government's decision was a shortage of peacekeeping soldiers, which had been particularly affected by the deployment of the 250 soldiers in the second rotation to the UN war crimes tribunal in Sierra Leone. He added that Mongolia continues to talk to Turkey about a deployment of soldiers to Afghanistan under Turkish command at some point in the future, but said that no government decision has been made yet. Davaasuren added that, whenever the subject had come up, Prime Minister

Enkhbold had always been a strong supporter of continuing Mongolia's military commitment in Iraq.

¶4. (SBU) Note: We intend to work with MFA and the Ministry of Defense to correct any misimpressions about the GOM decision, and to publicly welcome the commitment to remaining a part of the military coalition in Iraq.

SLUTZ